

Fire Watch Procedures

The decision to establish a fire watch is based on the potential for property loss or business interruption due to fire. A fire watch provides heightened surveillance of a facility, typically during impairment of building fire protection systems, communications systems, security systems, or other emergencies. Often, general access to the building by employees and/or public must be restricted.

When fire protection systems are impaired, buildings should be surveyed for hazards by the Property Manager, paying particular attention to those areas undergoing alterations. Hazardous activities, such as hot work operations, should be curtailed until protection is restored.

A fire watch is not a substitute for providing protection for building occupants from the hazards of fire. If the building is occupied, or partially occupied, occupants should be notified of alternate measures being taken for fire protection. The Property Manager must determine that adequate safeguards are in place before allowing occupants to return to the building.

Purpose of a Fire Watch.

- Continually monitor the facility for conditions which might lead to fire or explosion,
- Promptly notify the fire Department that a fire has occurred,
- Prevent unauthorized access to the facility

Organization of a Fire Watch. A fire watch requires planning specific to the facility in order to be effective. Meaningful instructions cannot be prepared without an investment of time and thought by the property manager. Persons should be assigned to organize and administer fire watch activities for each facility, with a clear line of succession in the event of absences. If a contract guard service is providing the fire watch, supervision should be provided by the guard service with documents describing specific details as to what is expected.

Issues to be addressed in a fire watch plan include:

- Establishing a command center to communicate with personnel on fire watch patrol. The command center should have a telephone and a directory of names and telephone numbers, including emergency numbers that may need to be contacted.
- The number of persons required to conduct the fire watch - other assigned duties should not interfere with surveillance responsibilities.
- Persons performing fire watch tours should be physically fit, mentally alert, morally responsible, and remain calm in an emergency. Persons conducting the fire watch should have adequate equipment and information to safeguard their own health and safety, including two ways to exit out of the building in an emergency. A means of two-way communication is necessary as fire watch personnel may need to notify management of personal illness or injury, the presence of intruders, or other situation requiring management decision.
- Areas that are unoccupied during working and non-working hours should be identified.
- Routes to be followed, with keys provided as required, to adequately survey the facility.
- Rounds should be conducted at least hourly for unoccupied buildings. A rest period between rounds is reasonable. Where special conditions exist, such as the presence of exceptional hazards, or when fire protection equipment is impaired, additional rounds should be instituted. The first round of the shift should include a thorough inspection of all building spaces.
- Sign-in and sign-out procedures, intervals for fire watch personnel to call in to the command center during tours, and other means to supervise fire watch personnel.

Fire Watch Duties. The duties of personnel performing fire watch tours include:

- Be alert for all emergencies, paying special attention to known hazardous areas.
- Be familiar with the building's fire protection equipment and how to operate a fire extinguisher.
- Be taught to notify the Fire Department first before taking other action, know how to admit fire department personnel to the building, and to direct officers to the location of the fire.
- Correct conditions likely to cause or contribute to a fire; such as combustibles in proximity to hot equipment, directing activities of people authorized to be on site but unfamiliar with fire prevention procedures, extinguish smoking materials, identify leaks or spills of hazardous liquids, and impairment of fire protection systems.
- Report immediately any unusual condition that he/she cannot correct without assistance. For example, during freezing weather, the guard should be alert to those areas where freezing could be a problem, and check that temperature is being properly maintained.